Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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Tales of Lunacy and Hope in New Orleans

By Bill Quigley

from New Orleans.

In this city, seven months after Katrina, senior citizens are living in their cars. WWL-TV introduced us to Korean War veteran Paul Morris, 74, and his wife Yvonne, 66. They have been sleeping in their two-door sedan since January. They have been waiting that long for FEMA contractors to unlock their 24' x 10' trailer in their yard and connect the power so they can sleep inside it in front of their devastated home.

This tale of lunacy doesn't even begin to stop there.

Their trailer may well cost more than their house. While FEMA flat out refuses to say how much the government is paying for trailers, reliable estimates by the *New York Times* and others place the cost at over $60,000 each.

How could these tiny FEMA trailers cost so much?

Circle B Enterprises of Georgia was awarded $287 million in contracts by FEMA for temporary housing. At the time, that was the seventh highest award of Katrina money in the country. According to the *Washington Post*, Circle B was not even being licensed to build homes in its own state of Georgia and filed for bankruptcy in 2003. The company does not even have a website.

Here is how it works. The original contractor takes their cut and subcontracts out the work of constructing the trailer to other companies. Once it is built, they subcontract out the transporting the trailers to yet other companies that pay drivers, gas, insurance and mileage. They then subcontract out the hookups of the trailers and keep taking cuts for their services. Usually none of the people who make the money are lo-

(**New Orleans** *continued on page 6)*

The Break-Up of Iraq

By PATRICK COCKBURN

from Irbil, Iraq.

Iraq is splitting into three different parts. Everywhere there are signs of the fault lines opening up between Sunni, Shia and Kurd. In the days that immediately followed the attack on the Shia shrine in Samarra on February 22, some 1,300 bodies, mostly Sunni, were counted in and around Baghdad. The Shia-controlled Interior Ministry, whose police commandos operate as death squads, asked the Health Ministry to release lower figures. A friend of mine, a normally pacific man living in a middle-class Sunni district in west Baghdad, rang me to say: "I am not leaving my home. The police commandos arrested 15 people from here last night including the local baker. I am sitting here in my house with a Kalashnikov and 60 bullets, and if they come for me I am going to open fire".

It is strange to hear George Bush and John Reid deny that a civil war is going on, given that so many bodies – all strangled, shot or hanged solely because of their religious allegiance — are being discovered every day. Car bombs exploded in the markets in the great Shiite slum of Sadr City. Several days later a group of children playing football in a field noticed a powerful stench coming up from the ground. Police opened up a pit in which 27 dead men were lying, probably all of them Sunni, stripped to their underpants, tortured and shot in the head. Two and a half years ago, when the first suicide bomb directed against Shia killed 85 people outside the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, there was no Shia retaliation. They were held back by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the hope of gaining power through legal elections. Since the Samarra bomb this restraint has definitively ended: the Shia militias and death squads slaughter Sunni in tit-for-tat killings every time a Shia is killed. Iraq is getting to be like Lebanon at the start of the civil war in 1975, when civilians were murdered in the street or dragged out of their cars and killed as soon as militiamen had had a quick glance at their identity cards.

Iraqis often deceive themselves about the depth of the sectarian divisions in their country. They say, rightly, that there are many intermarriages between Sunni and Shia and claim the sectarian divide is less extreme than it is in Belfast, where Roman Catholic and Protestant seldom marry. But such marriages are most common among the educated middle class in Baghdad and, in any case, mixed marriages became less common after 2003, as sectarian differences widened when Sunnis rebelled against the occupation and the Shia community did not.

My Shia and Kurdish friends, who see themselves as wholly non-sectarian, sincerely believe that the three-year-old Sunni rebellion is the work of a few jobless Baathist officials making common cause with Islamic fanatics imported from Saudi Arabia. 'They are not real Iraqis,' they say. They refuse to accept that the guerrillas are supported by most of the five-million-strong Sunni community, even though this has been repeatedly confirmed by opinion polls. The Sunni and the Kurds, for their part, see the Shia leaders as puppets manipulated by Iranian intelligence. They will not take on board that the 15-16 million Shia, 60 per cent of the population, are adamant in refusing to give up their bid for power after being marginalized for centuries. Kurdish hostility to Arabs, after decades of savage suppression, is equally underestimated by both Shia and Sunni.

While I was in Irbil, the Kurdish capital, two Sunni friends emailed me to say they planned to drive from Baghdad to see me. They didn't realize that they were as likely to spend the night in Irbil in jail as in a hotel, because Kurds regard all Arabs visiting from

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the rest of Iraq with deep suspicion. The differences between Shia and Kurd explain why there is still no new government of Iraq three months after last December's elections. The previously elected government, which took office on January 30, 2005, was based on a Kurdish-Shia alliance and is still in place, headed by Ibrahim al-Jaafari of the Shiite Dawa Party. Over the past year, the Kurdish leaders have come to detest him and are refusing to agree to a new government with him at its head. They were enraged when he made a surprise visit in early March to Turkey, whose leaders are bitterly resentful of Kurdish gains in Iraq, in order (they feared) to enlist Turkish support in his attempt to rob them of their quasi-independence within Iraq. Above all, the Kurdish leaders fear that Jaafari is maneuvering to avoid implementing an agreement under which they would gain permanent control of the oil province of Kirkuk, which they captured during the war in 2003.

Kirkuk, which sits on top of ten billion barrels of oil reserves, is a prize worth fighting for. It is also, even by Iraqi standards, a depressing and dangerous city. It sits on the plain 150 miles north of Baghdad, overlooked by a citadel whose ancient houses were wrecked by Saddam Hussein after the failed Kurdish uprising of 1991. There are heaps of rubbish everywhere. Despite the oil reserves there are mile-long queues of vehicles waiting to get petrol. Shops are small and mean. In the center of the city there is a cluster of dilapidated market stalls selling fruit and bread. "Kirkuk is a ruin; it is the most ruined city in Iraq", a Kurdish official said, with bitter pride, as we drove through the city. The Kurds want Kirkuk because it was from here they were expelled by systematic ethnic cleansing over the past fifty years. Between 120,000 and 200,000 Kurds and Turkomans were forced from their homes by Saddam after 1991. Almost all the small towns and villages in the province were bulldozed to reduce the Kurdish population and to prevent the buildings being used by guerrillas. The Iraqi constitution, along with the Shia-Kurdish agreement, promised to remove Arab settlers and return Kurds to Kirkuk. Adnan Mufti, the speaker of the Kurdish Parliament, told me that Jaafari's sudden visit to Turkish leaders "makes us suspicious" that the agreements will be forgotten. Grim place though it is, undisputed possession of the province and its oilfields is vital to the Kurds if they are to get close to self-determination.

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Under the constitution, passed in a referendum on October 15, the fate of Kirkuk will be decided by December 31, 2007. If Kirkuk joins the Kurdish region, the Kurds will have first rights to new oil discoveries. Saddam had denied them a share in oil revenues; any Kurd found working in the oil industry was sacked. "Of the 9,000 employees working for the Northern Oil Company in 2003, only 18 were Kurds, and they were mostly servants", said Rezgar Ali Hamajan, the chief of Kirkuk's provincial council. Now the Kurds are intent on having their own oil. Given that the need to share oil income is almost the only thing holding Iraq together, the secession of Kirkuk to join the Kurdish Regional Government could be the decisive moment in the dissolution of the country.

Inhabited by Kurds, Turkomans and Arabs, Kirkuk is a good if unnerving place to observe the growing hatred between Iraq's ethnic communities. The Kurds won five out of nine parliamentary seats in the parliamentary election in December. "Security is not as bad as in Baghdad", said Rezgar Ali, a former land surveyor who was for years a Peshmerga commander in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), but he admits that this not saying a great deal. He complained that the media exaggerated the violence in the city. "One day a rich Kurdish lady was kidnapped", he said. 'They claimed she was a female Kurdish leader. In fact, it was just an ordinary kidnapping'". He admitted that many Arab police officers were likely to be collaborating with the insurgents and that several Arab police chiefs had been arrested.

But one recent development had shocked even Rezgar Ali despite years of guerrilla warfare with largely Arab insurgents. In the center of Kirkuk there is a long building, imposing compared to the ramshackle houses all around. This is the Republic hospital. It is here that most of the casualties from gun battles, bombings and assassinations are brought. In 2005, some 1,500 people were killed or wounded in Kirkuk province.

Badly wounded soldiers, police and civilians were taken to the emergency section of the hospital. Large numbers of them died, and it turned out there was an extraordinary reason for this. Some time earlier, the hospital had recruited an enthusiastic young doctor called Louay, who was always willing to help. What other doctors didn't know was that Louay, an Arab, was a member of an insurgent cell of the Ansar al-Sunna group. He used his position to ensure that soldiers, policemen and government officials died of their injuries. A police inquiry found Dr. Louay guilty of killing 43 of his patients. He doesn't seem to have found this very difficult. Many of the injured were bleeding when they reached the hospital. According to Colonel Yadgar Shukir Abdullah Jaff, a senior policeman, "Louay was able to go anywhere in the hospital because he was an assistant. He was there continuously. He would inject patients he wanted to kill with a high dosage of a medicine, which made them bleed more."

Given that Iraqi hospitals are invariably short-staffed and there is little time for autopsies, Dr. Louay might have been able to carry on his killings indefinitely. But when Kurdish security in Sulaimaniyah, where the PUK is based, arrested the leader of his cell, Abu Muhijiz, whose real name is Malla Yassin, confessed that Louay was a member of his group. He detailed the grisly work that had been carried out over the previous eight or nine months.

In Kirkuk, the most effective military and police units are Kurdish. The same is true in Mosul, the mainly Sunni city on the Tigris further to the west. Nominally, there are 12,000 police in Mosul province, drawn mainly from the Jabour tribe. But Saadi Pire, the former PUK leader in Mosul, says: "These are policemen only by day and terrorists at night." The Sunni in Mosul, for their part, see what the U.S.A. claims

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is a war against insurgents as an American-Kurdish attack on their community.

Across Iraq, community-based allegiances within army and police units are sapping the power of the state. As sectarian and ethnic war escalates, people want militiamen from their own community defending their street, regardless of whether or not they belong in theory to the army or the police. In Sunni areas, the only people well enough armed to organize a defense are the resistance fighters, and the fear of Shia death squads swells their ranks. In Shia areas, sectarian bombings and shootings lead to greater reliance on the Mehdi Army of the nationalist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Meanwhile, the number of American casualties has decreased: it is now about one a day, compared to two or three a day last year. The insurgents believe that the Americans are going to leave in any case as support for the war diminishes in the U.S.A. and that attacks against U.S. troops are, therefore, less urgent. But in the Sunni heartlands north of Baghdad the Sunni resistance is as strong as it has ever been.

Solidarity within each community – Kurdish, Shia and Sunni – is strong. But none is monolithic. Iraqis in general are highly cynical about the honesty and competence of their own leaders. The four to five million Kurds have a strong sense of national identity and are well organized. Nevertheless, on March 16 thousands of Kurds marching in Halabja to commemorate the deaths of the 5,000 people killed in the 1988 poison gas attack on the town burned down their own brand-new monument. It was a curious, circular building, housing a museum; from the distance it looked like a strangely constructed mosque. Opened by Colin Powell in 2003, it contained life-size models of the dying, and photographs of the dead. For the past two years Kurdish officials have brought foreign officials to the monument as a symbol of what the Kurds suffered under Saddam Hussein. People in Halabja watched the visitors with growing rage. Few of them traveled one mile further, to see the sufferings of people in present day Halabja – for whom little had been done since 1988. Funds sent from abroad to help the survivors of Saddam Hussein's most famous atrocity never seemed to arrive.

I reached Halabja after the riot had subsided. The guards at the monument were still looking shaken. The building itself was gutted by fire: long strips of plastic hung from one of the ceilings. Several small fires were burning around the museum. Kana Tewfiq, one of the Peshmerga guards, told me he'd been hit in the spine by a stone thrown from the crowd. He said they had taken "gasoline and oil from the museum generator to get the fire going". A second group of Peshmerga had arrived and fired into the crowd, killing a 17-year-old demonstrator and wounding half a dozen others. Shako Mohammed, the local political boss for Halabja, arrived with a couple of carloads of bodyguards to survey the damage. He said he had begged people not to demonstrate while he took their demands to the PUK government in Sulaimaniyah. He suspected that the crowd had been infiltrated by agents of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, which once controlled the region.

In the local hospital a 29-year-old man called Othman Ali Gaffur was lying in a bed with a bullet through his leg. His wounds looked serious: he was missing part of his left hand and had only one eye. But these injuries turned out to be old, the result of ordnance detonating when he was playing with it as a child. Othman was a journalist on the magazine put out by the local handicapped people's association in Halabja, to which 5,000 people belong. He said the first aim of the demonstration was to keep government officials away. "They were always promising us help but the help never came. There are no roads, no streets here, only mud. They only took people to see the monument to the dead and never to see the living. That's why it became a target." Another man, Omar Ali, said he personally was against violence and burning the monument, but that "if we don't do something they won't listen".

At this point several Peshmerga entered the ward where I was talking to the wounded and said I should leave. I refused to go, and they seemed divided on what to do about me. When I did leave, they surrounded the car and said I should stay where I was while they rang their headquarters. When they finally got through, after several attempts, they were told to let me go. Later the PUK, which rules this area, claimed that Islamic fundamentalists and shadowy pro-Iranian groups had fomented the riots. Down in Kirkuk, however, a senior PUK official admitted the next day that this was nonsense. 'What happened in Halabja could happen anywhere in Iraq because people look at what has happened to them and don't think their leaders are any good.' Iraq is divided and the insurgency is strong, but the real reason for the collapse of Iraq is the weakness of the state. Ali Allawi, the finance minister, told me that corruption had reached Nigerian levels and that the government is just a parasitic entity living on oil revenues. It's not merely that a percentage of spending disappears into official pockets: entire budgets vanish. The U.S.A. and Britain are trying to push forward Iyad Allawi as a sort of security super-minister. But while he was prime minister in 2004-05, the whole $1.3 billion defense procurement budget disappeared. Millions more were spent on a contract to protect the vital Kirkuk-Baiji oil pipeline, but the money was embezzled. The few men hired to guard the pipeline often turned out to be the same men who were blowing it up. Ali Allawi says the insurgency is largely financed by oil smuggling, and 40-50 per cent of the vast profits go to the resistance.

The moment when Iraq could be held together, as a truly unified state, has probably passed. But a weak Iraq suits many inside and outside the country, and it will still remain a name on the map. American power is steadily ebbing

The moment when Iraq could be held together, as a truly unified state, has probably passed. But a weak Iraq suits many inside and outside the country, and it will still remain a name on the map. American power is steadily ebbing. The British forces are largely confined to their camps around Basra. A "national unity government" may be established but it will not be national, will certainly be disunited, and may govern very little. "The government could end up being a few buildings in the Green Zone", one minister said. The army and police are already split along sectarian and ethnic lines. The Iranians have been the main winners in the struggle for the country. The U.S.A. turned out to be militarily and politically weaker than anybody expected. The real question now is whether Iraq will break up with or without an all-out civil war. CP

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Red Reporter on the Front Lines

The Memoirs of Wilfred Burchett

By Christopher Reed

I had to wait for my review copy of this book for a few weeks. The publisher in Sydney explained that the copy scheduled for me had been diverted to an interloper who had urgently demanded a copy. The interloper turned out to be none other than General Giap, the military genius of the 20th century, vanquisher of the French at Dien Bien Phu, mangler of the world's mightiest battle machine.

That Vietnam's supreme hero was eager to have his copy of *Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist: The Autobiography of Wilfred Burchett* (University of New South Wales Press) is not surprising. Burchett knew Giap personally, and mentions him numerous times in the volume's 756 pages. He also knew and was a valued friend of Chou En-lai, Ho Chi Minh, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Fidel Castro, Major Charles Orde Wingate, and a host of senior ministers, diplomats and politicians, mainly from China and Vietnam.

This does not mean Burchett (1911-1983) was one of those journalists who love power and hang around with its purveyors and practitioners in the belief they, and only they, will provide the important news. On the contrary, Burchett came from the opposite school — and was the better reporter for it. He believed in being on the spot, but also in talking to ordinary people and above all in observing and probing events.

The book is co-edited by artist George Burchett, Wilfred's younger son, and Dr Nick Shimmin, an Anglo-Australian author and editor, who describes Wilfred as "the greatest journalist Australia has ever produced, and one of the best foreign correspondents the world has ever seen". I worked with Burchett, liked him a lot, agree with Shimmin's definition, and sadly his second point, that people exist "who have sustained decades-long, vitriolic attacks on him and his legacy." The reason: Burchett reported from "the other side" and made no secret of his Communist sympathies.

To a post-Cold War generation the intensity of this hatred may seem odd. Even to those of us who remember those days, the nastiness of the period's ideological divisions and the extremes to which the right would go in its hysteria and paranoia, stays as the sourest of memories .

Among those in power that Burchett met, brash American bravado and ignorance remain unmatched in his account of four decades of making war and seeking peace, but for sheer oafishness his own hick Australians go unequalled. The British excel in racist snobbery and incompetence, backed by ghastly "old boy" camaraderie piled on uninvited, and which Burchett masterfully captures and pins. The wise Chinese, valiant Vietnamese and forbearing Russians mostly maintain a gallant composure, but as noted, the author is pro-Communist.

Yet was he a capital-c Communist, or a "Red" to use the old color scheme? This has been a recurring theme in evaluations of Burchett's work, and it returns with this book. As he made his beat unique, reporting the Vietnamese war literally from Vietcong underground tunnels, and from it scooped his journalist colleagues regularly, Burchett often featured in the news himself. On such occasions, the word "Communist" was simply an adjective placed in front of his name. Did it invalidate his findings?

He always denied being a Communist and does so several times in the book. Nobody has ever produced a piece of paper belonging to a Communist party with Burchett's name and signature upon it.

Does it matter if Wilfred Burchett joined the Communist Party of Australia in the Depression as a young man seeking work as a construction carpenter amid mass unemployment, and supporting the downtrodden against big bosses and rapacious landlords? Or did he join later somewhere else, or never?

My plea is to give the Burchett/CP membership charge an overdue and much-deserved rest. It remains after all these years only a Cold War cudgel to beat one of the greatest providers of news from the left that journalism has produced, and who therefore mightily pissed off the authoritarian right because his scoops were so telling.

This is the man who in 1967 when preparing one of his 31 books, called it upon publication in 1968, *Vietnam Will Win.* The US was then claiming imminent victory, but was defeated eight years later.

Burchett saw the issues he discusses up close. Employed in penury in his native Gippsland, Victoria, he discovers the power of workers who organize when they help him combat a ruthless boss. Later in 1938 as a travel courier in Germany — he was a self-taught multi-linguist — he helps many of his agency's Jewish customers to escape Nazi persecution. One he visits in Berlin is too distraught to speak. He later tells Burchett that literally two minutes before he rang the door bell, his brother had shot himself dead rather than face a concentration camp.

In 1967 Burchett titled his book "Vietnam Will Win". The US was then claiming imminent victory, but was defeated eight years later.

Burchettt did not become a reporter until almost 30. It was in Australia, where the war now raging that nobody thought would happen reminded editors of one reader's letters they consistently declined to publish. They came from a young man who seemed to know a lot about Germany and he was invited to write articles. This experience formed Burchett's opinion of the woeful laziness and lack of guts in the mainstream press that guided the rest of his life's journalism. He worked mainly for small left publications, after some glorious war reporting in Burma, India, and China — and scooping the world on Hiroshima — with the *Daily Express* of London, then one of the world's best papers for foreign coverage despite its eccentric Toryism.

He lived in Indo-China, Moscow, East Europe and Peking, but was always away on stories. His weary months with ceasefire talks at Panmunjom during the Korean war demonstrate in detail the duplicity of American negotiators, who wanted the war

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to continue, and expose a dreadful truth: that military men and diplomats care more about scoring points off each other than the fact that their delays cause mass deaths each day they prevaricate.

He makes a strong circumstantial case that Americans did use germ warfare in Korea — another subject that dogged his career and inflamed opponents.

His repeated spells of months living with National Liberation Front guerrillas, dressed in a black pajama-style outfit with a conical straw hat, riding a bicycle, crouching in tunnels, sleeping in hammocks, and moving mostly at night in areas "controlled" by American forces and their South Vietnam allies, often inside Saigon, showed him that no matter what military monster roared forth, the country was already lost to the foreign invaders and their puppets. He knew.

Then he would publish these truths. No wonder he was hated. In Greece in 1946 when his dispatches exposed the fake election and forecast civil war, the British consul-general who earlier called him "old boy," now told him he was expelled. An American journalist was murdered. The civil war lasted more than three years.

"I had merely reported what I observed", he writes, "drawing upon the natural and logical deductions from these observations. But the period in which what becomes obvious truth catches up with that perceived and published by a diligent journalist, can be very uncomfortable, as I have discovered many times in my career. And the process keeps repeating, with no credit from the critics of past bull's eyes when they are disputing the accuracy of the latest shot."

He makes it sound simple, and in fact it is not that complicated. Mainstream media are festooned with lies every day, especially in the US, where a major reason is American insistence on "objective" quotations. This means you print the lies officials tell you. These "officials" are selected with blatant bias. Months pass without hearing from one trade union leader. Left-of-liberal opinions are never sought. Known mountebanks mouth on unchallenged. And in wars, as we know, truth is the first casualty.

Yet here is another important question raised by Burchett's book, which is an enlargement of his 1981 recollections, *At the Barricades*. Why is it considered wrong, even treacherous, for someone to report a war on the side fighting the nation in which he or she is a citizen? There is no law against it — although in Burchett's case his government wanted to pass one, while refusing for 17 years to replace his stolen passport.

As he points out, the *New York Times* reporter Harrison Salisbury (quoted in the front as a Burchett admirer), and the leftish British journalist James Cameron, both visited north Vietnam during the war. They were not labelled "Communist agent" as Burchett was by Tom Lambert in the *Los Angeles Times.* Lambert's shoddy lies offer direct evidence that these are his customary currency. "With the inception of Communism, and its deliberate subjection of journalism to ideology, a new type of reporter came into being...the journalist political agent," Lambert fibs. Never, of course, has capitalism required ideological fealty from the journalists it employs...

In another respect, Burchett readily admits to acting as an agent in the sense of participating in the historical events he finds himself reporting, to try to bring about something useful. It is the simple duty of a member of society, he argues. He became a key source for fellow journalists at the Paris peace talks on Vietnam and at Panmunjom; he conveyed constructive messages between warring sides; and he intervened to help an Australian prisoner of war in Korea (and was castigated by other ex-prisoners as a KGB agent for his trouble).

If there is criticism of this large work it is the final chapter and its ending. Burchett, as edited, concludes with an outraged account of the biased conduct of a court case for defamation he brought in Sydney in 1974. A miserable right-wing ex-senator, John Kane, wrote an article accusing Burchett of taking money from the KGB to act on its behalf while his own nation was at war with enemies the KGB supported. In other words he was a traitor. The main witness against him was a Soviet defector of notorious dishonesty, who claimed to have recruited him in Moscow where Burchett lived in luxury.

By bringing the $1m action, Burchett gave the Australian conservative dingbats who had always hated him a superb opportunity to air every foul slander and slur they could imagine. They exploited this fully. Adultery and blackmail were dragged in. He was said to bring down governments just by visiting their countries, as he had in Greece and Portugal. None of it was true but little real evidence for him was permitted, except an old Moscow acquaintance who recalled his apartment as modest.

His case was unnecessary as Labor had won the recent election, in which Kane was ousted. It immediately restored Burchett's passport, whereupon the newspapers headlined him "Citizen Burchett". Months later, headlines screamed about wild courtroom allegations. He should have dropped the case and let Kane wallow in his inadequacies.

Instead, Burchett won a pyrrhic victory. The jury found he had been defamed, but that Kane had parliamentary privilege for his previously-spoken allegations — something a cub reporter could have spotted. Burchett was stuck with six-figure costs he could not pay, restoring the exile caused by his formerly missing passport. Never having learned libel as a trainee reporter, Burchett may not have known enough about parliamentary privilege; his lawyer should have warned him.

The book ends there, on a sad note not fully explained. Missing too for space reasons are his mid-1970s exploits in Portugal and its former African colonies, and elsewhere. The solution would be Volume 2 of Burchett's memoirs: his last travels and thoughts, the final fitting climax to a life magnificently lived by a good man doing a good job the best way he could. CP

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cal workers.

With $60,000, many people could adequately repair their homes.

Why not just give the $60,000 directly to the elderly couple and let them fix up their home? Ask Congress. FEMA is not allowed to give grants of that much. Money for fixing up homes comes from somewhere else, and people are still waiting for that to arrive. While many corporations are making big money off of Katrina, Mr. and Mrs. Morris wait in their car.

Craziness continues in the area of the right to vote.You would think that the nation that put on elections with satellite-voting boxes for Iraqis and Afghanis and Haitians and many others would do the same for Katrina evacuees. Wrong. There is no satellite voting for the 230,000 citizens of New Orleans who are out of state. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Advancement Project, ACORN and the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund have all fought for satellite voting but Louisiana and the courts and the U.S. Justice Department have said no.

The rule of thumb around here is that the poorer you are, the further you have been displaced. African Americans are also much more likely to be poor and renters – the people who cannot yet come back to a city where rents have doubled. They are the ones bearing the burdens of no satellite voting.

The people already back make New Orelans look much more affluent than the pre-Katrina city. The place is also much whiter. Many of those already back in New Orleans are not so sure that all of New Orleans should be rebuilt. The consequence of that is not everyone will be allowed to return. Planners and politicians openly suggest turning poor neighborhoods into green spaces. No one yet has said they want to turn their own neighborhood into green space – only other people's neighborhoods – usually poor people's neighborhoods. Those who disagree are by and large not here.

New Orleans has not been majority white for decades, but it is quite possible that a majority of those who are able to vote in the upcoming election will be white. Thus the decisions about the future of New Orleans are poised to be made by those who have been able to get back and will exclude many of those still evacuated. Guess what type of plans they will have for New Orleans?

There are many, many more tales of lunacy across town as all systems have melted down: criminal justice, healthcare, public education, churches, electricity, water, garbage, our environment – you name it..

But, there are also clear signs of hope.

Across New Orleans neighborhood groups are meeting every weekend planning their own comebacks. People catch rides back into town, visit ruined neighborhoods, greet neighbors and together make plans to recover. Because governmental action and contractors are so slow, groups are looking to their own resources and partnering with churches and community groups and universities and businesses to fill in the gaps where the politicos have not yet been able to respond. The citizens themselves are our greatest hope.

We also have allies that give us hope.

We have been amazed and refreshed by the thousands of college students who took their spring break in New Orleans helping our elderly and uninsured families gut houses, clean up streets, and advocate for justice with Common Ground Relief, the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund, Catholic Charities, ACORN, and many other church and civic groups. Even law students! Over 1,000 law students helped provide legal aid and are providing the first comprehensive documentation of abuses of local and out of town workers by businesses.

Over 100 clergy from across the U.S.A. visited New Orleans with the PICO Network, as did hundreds of other people of faith with the Jeremiah community. The Protestant Women are here now, and the Interfaith Worker Justice group meets here soon, Together, these groups raise the voices of their faith communities and call for justice in the rebuilding of our communities.

On the national level, we see rising support from numerous social justice groups. Several created the Katrina Information Network, an Internet advocacy group that enables people across the country to take action with us to influence all levels of government in the rebuilding effort. We are inspired by the veterans and allies who marched from Florida to New Orleans to highlight the diversion of money from our cities to war efforts.

Yes, we have lunacy in New Orleans. But there are also signs of hope.Whether lunacy or hope will triumph in New Orleans is yet to be determined. But we appreciate those of you who are working in solidarity with us to try to keep our hope alive. CP

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